



#StayStrongNC

Interim COVID-19 Reopening Policies for NC Pre-K Programs

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NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development
and Early Education



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NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies must provide this guidance to all NC Pre-K sites and NC Pre-K teaching staff no later than August 7, 2020. Sites should contact their Contracting Agency and Contracting Agencies should contact their NC Pre-K Program Policy Consultant with questions about this guidance. For specific questions about contracts, please contact your DCDEE Contract Administrator.

1. Background

On July 14th, Governor Cooper [announced](#) state plans for the reopening of NC public schools under a Plan B model which enforces health protocols including cleaning, screening, and social distancing. limits the service capacity for public schools and enforces strict health protocols. As of July 29th, over half of school districts across the state have opted for even stricter criteria by keeping schools closed and supporting remote learning, only (Plan C).

The NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) is the governing authority for all licensed child care facilities in the state of North Carolina; therefore, NC Pre-K classrooms, whether located in public school sites or nonpublic/private sites, fall under the jurisdiction of DCDEE.

From March 14th (when public schools across the state were first closed for in-person instruction) through the end of the school year, DCDEE partnered with Duke University to study the experiences of NC Pre-K lead teachers, teacher assistants, administrators, and contracting agencies during the unprecedented experience of remote learning across NC Pre-K classrooms. In July 2020, the Duke Center on Child and Family Policy [published a report](#) analyzing the survey responses of over 3,000 NC Pre-K teachers, which was a response rate of approximately 90%. The report highlights the efforts NC Pre-K teachers undertook to suddenly transition to remote learning. This report also identifies areas where NC Pre-K teachers may need more support as they prepare for offering any remote learning in 2020-2021 school year, including:

- Providing formal guidance and training regarding the adaptation of classroom curriculum for remote learning;
- Supporting the effective use of video-based communication platforms; and
- Establishing guidelines and supports for teachers to provide remote learning services regularly throughout the week.

The findings from the July 2020 report are integrated into the guidance that follows here.

The following guidance is meant to address reopening expectations specific to **NC Pre-K programs and classrooms. This guidance applies to all NC Pre-K classrooms, regardless of the setting in which they operate (public school, * private child care center, Head Start program.)** This guidance may be amended by the NC Pre-K state office as needed in accordance with changes in trends related to COVID-19.

*Note: While preschool sites operating in public schools are not expected to follow all requirements outlined in the K-12 public health guidance ([StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit \(K – 12\)](#)), they are expected to follow any additional health protocols that may be implemented by their individual schools in response to the new K – 12 schools public health guidance. For example, while preschool children, according the child care guidance, would not normally be expected to social distance, they may be asked to social distance while eating in the cafeteria.

2. Goals for the 2020-21 NC Pre-K Program Year

We know that our children learn best when they have the opportunity to be together with their classmates and teachers. COVID-19 has presented many challenges to the way we work, live, learn and socialize with each other. Our goals seek to provide as much stability and proven in-person instruction as possible as we navigate through the pandemic.

- **All NC Pre-K students receive the benefit of fully in-person instruction to the fullest extent possible.**
- **All parents/guardians are offered the option of in-person instruction for the full program year.**
- **Recognizing the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning will be available for all NC Pre-K students as an option of last resort and used as sparingly as possible (*such as during time-limited school entry periods where schools are in remote learning only, during necessary quarantine periods.*)**
- **All remote learning offered will meet standard quality measures that support children’s healthy development and engage families in their children’s learning.**

3. Program Year

Program year will operate for a full 36 weeks as usual, 6.5 hours per day, 5 days per week, beginning no later than September 8th.

We encourage NC Pre-K programs to use the weeks before NC Pre-K instruction officially begins (which for all sites is no later than September 8th) to conduct child/family orientation, conduct home visits, and stagger entry of children virtually or in-person, as well as ensure teachers are trained and prepared to deliver multiple modalities of instruction (refer to *Remote Learning Requirements, Section 6*).

4. Mode of Classroom Instruction

- A. The NC Pre-K program is built upon a developmentally appropriate, play-based, interactive instruction and classroom environments.
- DCDEE strongly encourages NC Pre-K programs to prioritize having students physically present in Pre-K classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year.
 - If a school district, private child care facility, or Head Start program has buildings open for in-person instruction for any students or children, the NC Pre-K program must also offer Traditional/In-person or Hybrid instruction, unless any of the circumstances in Section 4B are met.
 - If a school district, private child care facility, or Head Start program does not have buildings open for in-person instruction, the NC Pre-K program may still be offered in Traditional/In-Person or Hybrid instruction, unless any of the circumstances in Section 4B are met.
 - Regardless of which plan a school district chooses to operate (Plan B/hybrid instruction or Plan C/remote instruction), school districts are strongly encouraged to prioritize having NC Pre-K students physically present in classrooms.
 - NC Pre-K sites must select from the three learning modes in the table below and inform their Contracting Agency.
 - Contracting Agencies must notify DCDEE regarding their sites’ initial mode of instruction (traditional/in-person, hybrid, or remote learning) by Friday, September 4, 2020 at 5:00PM.

- The full remote learning option will be available to Pre-K sites through November 6, 2020 only. This option may be extended depending on COVID-19 metrics and future state directives.

Traditional/In-Person	Hybrid	Full Remote Learning
<p>No children are learning remotely; all children are learning in the classroom.</p> <p>Even when selecting the Traditional/In-Person mode, a remote learning option must be available to students under certain circumstances (such as during necessary quarantine periods, if closure for deep cleaning is needed, for high-risk students)</p>	<p>Pre-K classroom/site is delivering a mix of in-person and remote learning to the same group of children – for example, if a school district is alternating days/weeks when students are in and out of school buildings or the classroom/site is providing some children with full-time in-person learning and other children with full-time remote learning.</p>	<p>No children are learning in the classroom; all children are learning remotely.</p>

B. Circumstances When Remote Learning May Be Needed

- During the weeks prior to instruction starting on September 8th (e.g., home visits and orientation may be done remotely)
- If NCDHHS issues a directive that requires closure and/or reduced capacity to minimize the spread of COVID-19
- If a COVID-19 cluster (5 or more cases) occurs at an NC Pre-K site and the Local Health Department recommends that the site and/or classroom(s) should close temporarily for cleaning
- If a parent/family has requested remote learning due to the child and/or a household member being high-risk for severe illness due to COVID-19
 - Information on who is at a higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19 is available from the [CDC](#) and [NCDHHS](#).
- If a parent/guardian requests remote learning due to concerns over their child’s health or safety in a traditional/ in-person setting
- If a child is not able to attend for an extended amount of days due to the child and/or household member(s) being sick and/or quarantined due to COVID-19
- If the NC Pre-K teaching staff has requested to telework due to their own high-risk status
- If a school district (or Head Start program) chooses to operate exclusively under Plan C with no exceptions for NC Pre-K.

5. Health and Safety Guidance

All preschool programs in public schools and private sites are required to follow the health and safety guidance outlined in the [ChildCareStrongNC Public Health Toolkit](#), in accordance with the [Memorandum on Preschool Programs and K-12 Public Health Guidance](#).

6. Remote Learning Requirements

There is limited evidence on best practices for remote learning for young children. DCDEE is committed to

providing a thoughtful approach to accessing high-quality early learning for children/families who must participate remotely, due to circumstances outlined in Section 4B. The information in this section describes an innovative effort to align in-person and remote instruction to all children receiving the NC Pre-K program.

DCDEE will seek ongoing feedback from families, educators, and staff on their experiences participating in remote learning. DCDEE does not want access to technology to be a barrier or limiting factor for any family's participation in remote learning resources. Therefore, it is expected that teachers will take a proactive, flexible, and responsive approach to families' needs to ensure participation.

A. Method and Duration of Delivery:

A traditional in-person NC Pre-K day is 6.5 hours of time in the classroom, including direct instruction, nap time, snacks, transitions, child-initiated play, and outdoor play. A child/family engaged in remote learning instead of in-person instruction should also be provided with an equivalent 6.5 hours, which includes direct instruction via remote learning (such as Remote Moments, section 6D), nap time, snacks, transitions, child-initiated play, outdoor play, family-led engagement activities, and 1:1 family check-ins (see Section 6E).

However, it would not be considered developmentally appropriate for a young child to receive 6.5 hours of direct remote instruction via a video meeting, for example, each day. Instead, NC Pre-K teachers should provide short direct instruction and provide activities and learning opportunities for children and families to engage in independently that total approximately 6.5 hours of available material daily for a remote learner/family.

B. Teaching Strategies Remote Learning Solution:

Remote learning and in-person learning should be coordinated so that children/families who may have to alternate between remote learning and in-person instruction have a seamless learning experience. DCDEE is providing the Teaching Strategies distance learning resources for all teachers and staff who support classrooms with at least one NC Pre-K child. Approximately 85% of NC Pre-K classroom teachers already use the Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment platform and will be familiar with content. The Teaching Strategies distance learning resources are also aligned with other approved NC Pre-K curricula.

The Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution will provide resources to teachers and families including:

- 24/7 access to digital curriculum allowing for consistency across in-person and remote learning
- Remote access to professional development best practices for in-person and remote learning
- Developmentally appropriate assessment resources
- Developmentally appropriate family-facing resources, including videos and activity instructions
- Two-way communication between teachers and families through a mobile application

NC Pre-K teachers are **strongly encouraged** to utilize Teaching Strategies resources for in-person instruction, and are **required** to use Teaching Strategies resources for remote instruction. Teachers should regularly supplement Teaching Strategies curriculum and materials as needed to support their individual students' and family needs.

More information on Teaching Strategies Distancing Learning Solution and other resources will be shared in the next few weeks.

C. Training Requirements:

All NC Pre-K lead teachers and teacher assistants, regardless of selected mode of instruction for their

site/classroom, will be expected to complete three (3) training sessions on the Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution throughout the school year, and will be expected to complete one (1) of those 3 training sessions by **Thursday, September 10th**.

DCDEE will provide a training schedule for NC Pre-K teachers, and will also provide training opportunities for teachers, coaches, and administrators on topics such as best practices utilizing technology in remote learning. These trainings will be detailed in a forthcoming communication.

D. Remote Instruction: ‘Remote Moments’

Remote Moments are blocks of live, direct, remote instruction delivered daily by lead teachers or teacher assistants. Teachers are **required** to:

- Offer Remote Moments at least once a day to children/families who are participating in remote learning.
 - For classrooms that are fully remote (i.e. no in-person learning is taking place), teachers must offer at least two (2) sessions with the same content at different times of day (e.g., offered once in the morning and once in the afternoon) to increase families’ ability to attend the session.
- Ensure that the timing of delivery of Remote Moments is consistent and predictable for families.
- Frequently communicate and advertise how to access remote content.
- Offer Remote Moment materials to families based on family needs, such as reliable access to technology or primary home language.
- Create Remote Moment content on the following developmental domains from the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development: Approaches to Play and Learning, Emotional and Social Development, Health and Physical Development, Language Development and Communication, Cognitive Development.
 - Some examples of high-quality Remote Moments could include circle-time or group activities like a read aloud, a shared writing activity, or a number fluency activity.

It is **recommended** that teachers:

- Provide Remote Moments through a virtual platform, such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and/or using Teaching Strategies digital resources.
- Plan Remote Moments that last for no more than 30 minutes at a time.
- Plan for Remote Moments that allow for two-way communication where teachers, children, and families can speak directly to one another.
- Plan Remote Moments separately from in-person instructional time and designed specifically for remote learners.
- Alternatively, plan Remote Moments that include together in-person and remote learners through a video platform set up during regularly scheduled in-person learning time (e.g., during a shared writing activity, video conferencing would allow remote learners to contribute to the conversation in real time.)
- Lead teachers or teacher assistants can plan and implement Remote Moments, depending on scheduling needs and maximizing time during the typical in-person learning day.
- Consider virtual field trips as a Remote Moment.
- Refer to the [NC DPI Online Pedagogy Considerations for Digital Instruction page](#) for guidance on protecting student safety and privacy while using audio and video conferencing services.

E. Family Engagement: ‘Check-ins’

Family/Child Check-ins are opportunities for the lead teacher (with teacher assistant as an optional participant) and a child/family to connect live through two-way communication (the teacher communicates with the

child/family, and the child/family communicates back) every week while the child/family is participating in remote learning. A Check-in could take place through a call, video conference, or through a socially-distanced in-person visit while everyone wears face coverings. A Check-in may be a brief conversation, or it could be a longer period of time depending on child/family need.

Building a strong relationship through frequent, quality interactions with families is always important – but even more important when providing remote learning. Families also need to be kept informed changes in schedule or protocols.

Lead Teachers are **required** to:

- Offer at least one Check-in every week to each child/family participating in remote learning
- Prepare for and document every Check-in in writing
- Make every reasonable effort to communicate with the family in an accessible manner, such as:
 - Adjust the timing of a Check-in given family feedback on scheduling
 - Attempt to contact a family member through multiple formats (text message, phone call, in-person socially-distanced visit with all people wearing face coverings) if other avenues are unsuccessful
 - For non-English dominant families, provide communication through an interpreter (e.g. staff, family member, etc.)

It is **recommended** that Lead Teachers:

- Provide applicable technical resources and support to families to participate in Check-ins (e.g. downloading the Teaching Strategies family application)
- Utilize weekly Check-in time to
 - Provide updates on procedures related to the school or site’s response to COVID-19
 - Share ongoing information on the child’s developmental progress using evidence-based observations
 - Provide individualized recommendations for activities and engagement opportunities for the family to best be able to support their child
- Encourage families to bring questions, concerns, ideas, and evidence of learning at home (e.g., pictures of activities)
- Encourage the child to be an active participant in the Check-in

F. Daily Instruction in Hybrid Learning Classrooms

Teachers are **required** to:

- Align the pacing/content of in-person and remote learning (e.g., utilize Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum online resources and aligned family activities to create in-person lesson plans and remote activities on the same topics)
- Provide the families of remote learners a consistent schedule of Remote Moments for families to opt into throughout the week
- Provide Teaching Strategies family engagement resources every day to children and their families, and supplement with any additional, relevant resources as needed
- Highlight opportunities for families to submit evidence of learning remotely through the Teaching Strategies platform or through other methods (e.g., sharing pictures of completed activities, sharing videos of the child engaging in the activity)
- Coordinate at least one (1) ‘Check-in’ per week for each remote learner/family

Teachers are **not** required to provide instruction outside a typical in-person teaching schedule. For example: an assistant teacher could monitor the children in-person during nap time, while the lead teacher conducts a Remote Moment in another room for virtual learners and families.

G. Daily Instruction for Classrooms with Remote Learners Only

Entirely remote classrooms with at least one NC Pre-K child and no in-person instruction

Teachers are **required** to:

- Plan for and deliver five (5) discrete Remote Moments with different activities throughout the week utilizing Teaching Strategies Distance Learning Solution resources
 - Each daily Remote Moment's content must be repeated twice at different times of day (e.g., offered once in the morning and once in the afternoon) to increase families' ability to attend the session
- Throughout the week, Remote Moments must align to the developmental domains: Approaches to Play and Learning, Emotional and Social Development, Health and Physical Development, Language Development and Communication, and Cognitive Development
- Provide the families of remote learners a consistent schedule of Remote Moments for families to opt into throughout the week
- Provide Teaching Strategies family engagement resources every day to children and their families
- Highlight opportunities for families to submit evidence of learning remotely through the Teaching Strategies platform or through other methods (e.g., sharing pictures of completed activities, sharing videos of the child engaging in the activity)
- Coordinate and provide at least two (2) 'Check-ins' per week for each remote learner/family. In a Full Remote Learning environment, it is essential that children/families remain in contact with their teacher; Therefore, the requirement is two (2) Check-ins as opposed to one (1).

H. Attendance in Hybrid or Full Remote Instruction

A child/family's attendance and participation in remote learning is defined as participating in weekly check-ins (either 1 or 2 depending on the mode of instruction). While participation in Remote Moments is beneficial for children/families, it will likely be more reliable for teachers to document ongoing participation in Check-ins as a way to track attendance.

7. Payment Policy

A. For the 2020-2021 school year, DCDEE will provide payments to NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies based on their contracted slots for the 2020-2021 school year.

DCDEE will provide payment for all contracted slots to provide stabilization to NC Pre-K programs during the COVID-19 pandemic when overall child care enrollment has been low as families have opted to keep children at home. Payment during the 2020-2021 school year will not be based on attendance. Payments will be generated based on the assigned teacher rate and the number of slots allocated to the classroom. Therefore, Contracting Agencies must allocate the maximum number of contracted slots to their NC Pre-K sites, as all slots will be funded regardless of attendance. However, contracting agencies must continue to engage in active recruitment strategies and family outreach events and make every effort to fully enroll eligible children in all

available slots. Contracting agencies will be required to report on enrollment numbers, attendance trends, and recruitment events as further detailed in the Reporting Requirements (section 8) of this guidance document.

B. Changes to Cash Advances:

Cash advances will not be offered during the 2020-2021 NC Pre-K program year. Instead, all NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies will receive a one-time **payment** at the beginning of the program year. Contracting Agencies will receive 1/10 of their total contracted amounts (administration and direct services). This payment is **not** a cash advance and will not require repayment or reconciliation at the end of the fiscal year. However, this amount will be deducted from the contractor's total contracted amount. FSRs for this one-time payment should adhere to fiscal policy and be submitted by the 10th business day of August (Friday, August 14, 2020). Contracting agencies should distribute this one-time payment to all sites according to their allocated slots regardless of teacher qualifications.

C. Payment Submission Process:

The Contracting Agency must submit the following items to DCDEE by the 10th business day of the month following the month of service to receive payment:

- An Electronic signed Financial Status Report: This form is not generated from NC Pre-K Kids, therefore it must be prepared by the Contractor and signed by the Superintendent, Chairman of the Board, CEO, or designee, or the Chief Fiscal Officer or designee.
- A signed Summary of Classroom Attendance: This form, signed by the Contractor, is generated from NC Pre-Kids after all classroom information for the month is entered.

Please note:

- A signed copy of each Monthly Attendance Report should be maintained on site by contractor for monitoring purposes.
- DCDEE accepts the Site Administrator (or designee) and Contractor's signatures as certification of each child's attendance and that the classroom is in compliance with the NC Pre-Kindergarten requirements.
- The Contractor must submit an FSR each month during the contract period.

Further guidance on the payment submission process is forthcoming.

D. COVID-19 Emergency Procedures for Requesting Use of Direct Service Funds:

DCDEE will allow requests for the flexible use of direct service funds for purposes including purchases of.

- Cleaning supplies to meet health/safety guidelines
- Personal protective equipment for staff (e.g., cloth face coverings)
- Technology for staff and families to engage in remote learning activities (e.g., tablets)
- Toy/book lending libraries for circulation to children's homes
- Supplies to support remote learning (e.g., manipulatives, child-sized scissors, writing and drawing supplies)
- Travel for home visits
- Professional development (technology, appropriate practice, etc.)

Contracting Agencies can request flexible use of direct service funds following the below process:

1. The NC Pre-K Contract Administrator presents a proposal for the use of direct service funds to the local NC Pre-K Committee. The amount may not exceed 2% of the total contract allocation.
2. The NC Pre-K Committee approves proposal for use of direct service funds.

3. The local NC Pre-K Contract Administrator submits approved proposal to the DCDEE Early Education Branch for approval (Lorena.gonzalez@dhhs.nc.gov).
4. DCDEE reviews proposal, budget and supporting documentation (e.g., committee minutes, product descriptions, price list, etc.).
5. DCDEE notifies local NC Pre-K contract administrator in writing with a decision (approved/need additional information/denied) within five (5) business days of receipt of proposal. When additional information is requested, the review period may exceed five (5) business days.
6. Upon approval, a budget revision must be submitted to move direct service funds from the contract budget line Direct Services Contractor or Subcontracting and Grants Direct Services to contract budget line item 11 “Other” (h) “Not Otherwise Classified.”
 - Instructions for completing a budget revision can be found at the following link: https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Portals/0/documents/pdf/N/NCPre-K_Budget_Revision_Instructions.pdf
7. The following documentation must be submitted to dcdee_ncprekfsr@dhhs.nc.gov:
 - The budget revision justification form and budget revision template are located here: <https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Home/DCDEE-Sections/North-Carolina-Pre-Kindergarten-NC-Pre-K>
 - Contracting Agencies should scroll down and click on “NC Pre-K Budget Revisions,” then click to download the “Budget Revision Justification Form” and “Budget Revision Template.”

E. Payment During Site Closures:

NC Pre-K sites may need to close classrooms/facilities at some point during the school year due to COVID-19 exposure or positive cases. NC Pre-K programs will continue to receive payment based on contracted/allocated slots regardless of whether classrooms/facilities need to close due to COVID-19 exposure or positive cases. However, teachers in these sites will be expected to provide remote learning services with children and families if the facility needs to close due to COVID-19.

8. Reporting Requirements

- A. NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies are required to provide ongoing, regular reports on their respective sites to DCDEE in the following areas:
 - Mode of instruction provided (traditional/in-person, hybrid, or full remote learning) at each of the sites
 - Number of teachers/TAs providing traditional/in-person and/or full remote learning
 - Number of children enrolled/placed in traditional/in-person and/or full remote learning
 - Number of children attending traditional/in-person, hybrid and/or full remote learning (refer to Section 6H for note about attendance in hybrid or full remote learning)
 - Number of enrolled children who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past reporting period
 - Number of staff who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past reporting period
 - For programs conducting traditional/in-person instruction, whether there were any closures in the past reporting period, and how many days was the site closed
- B. **Frequency of reporting:**
 - **Initial Mode of Instruction (Due Friday, September 4, 2020, 5:00PM)**
 - Contracting Agencies are required to report

- 1) The initial mode of instruction (Traditional/In-Person, Hybrid, or Remote Learning) that each of their sites will be using for the first nine (9) weeks of instruction; and
 - 2) Why the sites are selecting this mode of instruction
- **Ongoing Reporting: September 8th through end of school year**
 - NC Pre-K Contracting Agencies are required to submit a report on the regular items outlined above every other Tuesday at 5:00PM
 - The dates and reporting periods are as follows:

Report Due Date	Reporting Period
September 22, 2020	September 8, 2020 - September 18, 2020
October 6, 2020	September 21, 2020 – October 2, 2020
October 20, 2020	October 5, 2020 – October 16, 2020
November 3, 2020	October 19, 2020 – October 30, 2020
November 17, 2020	November 2, 2020 – November 13, 2020
December 1, 2020	November 16, 2020 – November 27, 2020
December 15, 2020	November 30, 2020 – December 11, 2020
December 29, 2020	December 14, 2020 – December 25, 2020
January 12, 2021	December 28, 2020 – January 8 2021
January 26, 2021	January 11, 2021 – January 22, 2021
February 9, 2021	January 25, 2021 – February 5, 2021
February 23, 2021	February 8, 2021 – February 19, 2021
March 9, 2021	February 22, 2021 – March 5, 2021
March 23, 2021	March 8, 2021 – March 19, 2021
April 6, 2021	March 21, 2021 – April 2, 2021
April 20, 2021	April 5, 2021 – April 16, 2021
May 4, 2021	April 19, 2021 – April 30, 2021
May 18, 2021	May 3, 2021 – May 14, 2021
June 1, 2021	May 17, 2021 – May 28, 2021
June 15, 2021	May 31, 2021 – June 11, 2021
June 29, 2021	June 14, 2021 – June 25, 2021

C. Method of Reporting:

Each NC Pre-K Contracting Agency will be emailed a personalized Excel workbook that is prepopulated with their NC Pre-K sites (based on the information in the NC Pre-K Plan database). Each workbook contains one worksheet for reporting each site’s mode of classroom instruction (due September 4th) as well as separate, identical worksheets for each two-week reporting period. Contracting Agencies will complete the relevant worksheets and email the workbooks to Patricia McCarter, NC Pre-K Coordinator at patricia.mccarter@dhhs.nc.gov by the specified due date.